

FOOD SECURITY IN CUBA: A COMPARISON OF TRDS, BODEGAS, AND AGRICULTURAL MARKETS

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INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990's, changes in Cuba's food policy have reflected a shift away from strictly regulated food rationing to a mixed system including the *libreta* system or rationing as well as agricultural markets and stores using convertible pesos (TRDs). This system has led to greater food security but also greater disparities in food accessibility. This paper reviews and analyses food prices in *bodegas*, agricultural markets, and TRDs in several municipalities in Cuba. Most of the food items found in the TRDs were unavailable in *bodegas* and agricultural markets. This confirmed a trend whereby more food items are becoming available only in TRDs. In addition, TRDs only accepted converted pesos (CUCs) as opposed to national pesos (CUPs), creating a disparity between those with access to the tourism industry and those who do not. [1] While food availability is greater than it was in the early 1990's, there are still issues surrounding food access for those without access to CUCs, linking food security to the tourism industry in Cuba. However, policy changes regarding currency unification and changes regarding the *libreta* system will impact food security issues in the future. [2]

METHODS

Systematic observational methods were used to acquire both qualitative and quantitative data on numerous comestible items and the locations they were found. Types of information included data related to type of store, prices, location, units of measurement, and source country. Store location was selected based on availability and location. As it was not selected randomly, the results in this study should not be understood as representative but are examples of stores and prices in Cuba. Statistical analysis was used to determine most common items as well as mean prices per unit of measurement. These data were then compared to current literature on food prices and salaries in order to understand the changing nature of comestible products and food security in Cuba.

RESULTS

In each of the *bodegas*, milk, cooking oil, rice, beans, and sugar were included in the ration. Not all of the items were available all of the time. All items were available for CUPs. In addition to the subsidized items provided by the *libreta* system, there were also other food items for sale separate from

the *libreta* system. These products also appeared to be subsidized when compared to similar items available in markets and TRDs. Of the agricultural markets that were studied, about half were agromercados and half were MLAs. In all of the agricultural markets, prices were listed in CUPs. There were noticeable differences between agromercados and MLAs, including size, and how items were priced. Apart from produce, sugar, rice, dried beans, and pork were available in agricultural markets. The imported foods found in the TRDs came from a variety of countries, in particular Spain and Mexico, and were only available in CUCs. Cuban goods were also available, although there were competing imports for these products. There were several local goods that were only found in TRDs such as chicken, fish, and cheese. Many of the items found in TRDs were expensive compared to products found elsewhere. TRDs also generally seemed to be targeting primarily Cuban consumers.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The average Cuban salary in a job paid by the state in 2012 was 466 CUP per month. [3] Based on this information, there are accessibility issues regarding comestible products in TRDs. However, based on these findings food security is achievable for most Cubans. In addition, currency unification will increase food accessibility as TRDs accept CUPs. [4] Although there are better economic circumstances now than there were 20 years ago, [2] the ways that food is sourced and distributed in Cuba continues to change in order to address changing economic and social circumstances.

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